

REVIEW OF CAUTELA AND ISHAQ'S
CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN BEHAVIOR THERAPY:
IMPROVING THE HUMAN CONDITION

JAMES A. KUHAGEN

NORTHERN VIRGINIA TRAINING CENTER

Touted as a “handbook to improve the human condition,” this book of readings by Cautela and Ishaq attempts to fill a very large order. The editors hope to show that psychological analysis and methodology have significant roles to play in the alleviation of human suffering at both the individual and the societal levels. Toward this end, they have amassed a thoughtful array of topics addressed by first-rate authorities. The mix crisscrosses the universe of behavioral applications including medical nonadherence, educational reform, parenting, HIV prevention, initial learning experiences, issues for seniors, altering nutritional habits, assessing the macrocontingencies of poverty, mobility training among people with visual impairment, communication training among people with autism, covert conditioning strategies in psycho-oncology, and sports psychology. These topics provide sufficient variety to engage almost anyone and then broaden one's thinking to additional issues. Some chapters are pragmatic in nature, attempting to follow the handbook motif, whereas others tend toward the academic. As a complement to the overall theme of this book, there is a fitting biographical piece written by Julie S. Vargas that traces Skinner's journey from early childhood, to creator of the baby-tender, to cultural designer.

Cautela, J. R., & Ishaq, W. (Eds.). (1996). *Contemporary issues in behavior therapy: Improving the human condition*. New York: Plenum Press.

Correspondence and requests for reprints should be addressed to James A. Kuhagen, Northern Virginia Training Center, 9901 Braddock Road, Fairfax, Virginia 22032-1941 (E-mail: Jimkuhva@aol.com).

One might argue that a “handbook to improve the human condition” is oxymoronic. Indeed, several chapters raise more questions than they answer. These heuristic interludes are refreshing and in themselves suggest that it is unlikely that a mere handbook can solve the complexities of the human condition. Further, it is unlikely that any one discipline can rescue humanity from its maladies. Perhaps “*contributions* to improve the human condition” is more apt.

After numerous chapters devoted to various forms of behavioral technology, we can thank Twachtman, in her chapter on communication training in autism, for integrating the basic but enormously important point that *respect* for other human beings is a critical building block for improving the human condition. Latham's chapter on “The Making of a Stable Family,” with its emphasis on proactivity and positively reinforcing consequences rather than reactivity and punitive consequences, should be required reading for all parents raising children. It translates basic principles of human behavior into practical skills that parents can implement. Of course, as Latham notes, this chapter has as much to do with the behavior of parents as with the behavior of children. Some scripted examples may suffer from the printed medium because they appear contrived and pedantic. Although the author notes that the topic is vast, there is little acknowledgment of significant foundations other than contingency management that contribute to a “stable family” (e.g., qualitative aspects of the parents' relationship, as well as educational, vocational, economic,

and religious factors). Azerrad, in his chapter subtitled "The Incredible Gift of Learning," addresses specific benevolent behaviors to be nurtured (including what he calls "sibling caring" and "Mother Theresa behaviors") that have received little attention from behavior analysts, but that are crucial to child development, a stable family, and ultimately a stable society.

The last section of the book turns to philosophy. Garrett proposes that *wisdom* is the key to a better world. He argues that in pursuit of wisdom, the endeavors of therapy, philosophy, and religion have more to offer than do science and technology. He develops the point that the solutions we choose must bring us happiness *and* morality.

As behaviorists, we have much to celebrate in this book; it recognizes the many areas of individual and collective life in which behavioral technology has made significant contributions or has the potential to do so. Cautela and Ishaq raise the prospect of additional volumes to further address the relevance of behaviorism to the mosaic of the human condition. Issues of prejudice, corruption, humankind's inhumanity to fellow humans, and peace, among others, suggest themselves as worthy topics. Perhaps it is a job for eternity.

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